

**Hearing Title:** June 17, 2010 Hearing to Review Responsible Fatherhood Programs of the Subcommittee on Income Security and Family Support

To Whom It May Concern:

The signers of this letter are a group of six recipients of Fatherhood and Healthy Marriage grants from the state of California. While we support the current proposal for the Innovation Fund in the 2011 budget, we would like to respectfully propose three revisions to that approach. We believe these improvements will more effectively meet the goal of increasing the benefits to children and their parents.

We propose that the Fatherhood, Marriage, and Families Innovation Fund:

- 1) **Continue to include relationship education as a key intervention in connecting fathers to their children.** Recent research from UC Berkeley indicates that fathers become more attached to their children when they take a relationship skills class with their partners than when they take the class as an individual. Also, four Child Support Enforcement demonstration projects conducted between 1994 and 2004 demonstrated that adding only job skills to a fatherhood program a) did nothing to increase the quantity or quality of fathering, b) increased employment rates in only two of the four projects, and c) in half the projects, increased conflict between men and the mothers of their children. Just as Healthy Marriage projects are required to partner with local domestic violence groups, the new fund can require that grantees partner with job service and drug rehabilitation providers to provide a continuum of care.  
  
Relationship skills training whether for married or unmarried couples, or currently unpartnered people is a promising new intervention. Preliminary results from evaluation of the current Healthy Marriage Demonstration projects indicate that low conflict healthy relationships do positively impact outcomes for children.
- 2) **Allow non-profits and faith based organizations to apply for some or all of the Innovation funds.** Currently there are over 125 fatherhood and marriage demonstration projects in 43 states. Frankly, not all the projects are worthy of replication. There are, however, some organizations doing great work with TANF and TANF eligible people and families, vulnerable youth, and other underserved populations that deserve further evaluation. If the money goes only to states, there will be fewer states with services. We are concerned that state overhead will deplete funds that would be better spent on direct services, and we estimate that up to 1,000 jobs could be lost.
- 3) **Focus the Innovation Fund on TANF and TANF eligible individuals, couples, and families.** We recommend that the program funds be focused exclusively on the most vulnerable families and be administered by the Office for Family Assistance. TANF is designed to help people learn skills, get jobs and secure other supports to help them out of poverty. It is our goal to increase connections between fathers and children and strengthen entire families. We will have a better chance of success if the work is overseen by the office with educational approaches and experienced supervising grants in this area.

We appreciate that the proposal is focused on pursuing research based solutions to the problems children experience when their families are disrupted. We, too, seek to utilize best practices, research based programs to improve outcomes for children.

Please give serious consideration to our modifications to the Fatherhood, Marriage, and Family Innovation Fund. We believe that by adopting our three recommendations, more children will get a strong start in life. Please call upon us should you need further information or have any questions.

**Sincerely:** Carolyn Rich Curtis, Sacramento Healthy Marriage Project; Kay Reed, Dibble Institute; M.P. Wylie, Relationship Research Foundation; Maxine Perryman-Diggs, Personal Involvement Center, Inc.; Mary Camacho, Imperial Valley Regional Occupation; Geoffrey Payton, Pittsburg Preschool and Community Council, Inc.

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